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By AGNES E. MEYER

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CHARLES LANG FREER

In Washington, D. C., adjacent to the structural monstrosity called the Smithsonian Institution, a perfect example of Florentine Renaissance architecture houses one of the finest collections of Near and Far Eastern art to be found in the Western world. Yet the Freer Gallery is little known by the American public. And Charles Lang Freer, its founder, is an enigma even to the scholars who now guide its destiny, as well as to those who come from the far corners of the earth to study the objects on exhibition and in the storerooms. Only during World War II did the Federal Government discover a practical use of some products of Mr. Freer's wide-ranging interests. The Navy was surprised when told that this amazing museum contained a very early and accurate description of the peculiar ocean currents which swirl about the islands of the Pacific in or near the orbit of Japan. As for realizing that our nation possesses in the Freer Gallery the most valuable tool of propaganda to prove to our Oriental friends that in the American capital they can find a deep appreciation of their highest cultural manifestations, to this our civil servants, whether in the State Department or in the Congress, are sublimely indifferent.

Who then was this uniquely endowed American, Charles Lang Freer? How did he happen to have the foresight when very early examples of Oriental art were unknown, whether in Europe or America, to collect objects so rare that today they are unobtainable? As it was my great good fortune to have known him intimately, several scholars eager to know him better, asked me to undertake the difficult task of describing the nature of our friendship, so passionate in its intensity because we both loved China, its history, its earth-bound philosophy, and the art objects which resulted from this profound union of thought and deed.

I met Mr. Freer, by chance, at an exhibition of Chinese paintings in a Fifth Avenue gallery in New York City, in January 1913. But what, after all, is chance? Our common interest was bound to

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bring us together, as there were so few people at that time who cared as deeply as we did about the long and brilliant history of Chinese culture. I had known for several years that Mr. Freer was the most zealous explorer of the Oriental art world, the only American who as early as 1906 had formed a collection of Near and Far Eastern paintings, bronzes and jades, so important that it was accepted as a gift to the nation by the Congress of the United States. To be suddenly confronted by this hero in person was an overwhelming event. A tall man, his personality was aristocratic, with an intimidating aloofness that was tempered by gay, mischievous eyes. My first consternation soon gave way to delight when he astonished me by saying, "At last we meet! I have heard that you share my enthusiasm. When can you come to Detroit to visit me and look over some of my things?"

What a surprising reception—and this from a man of whom I stood in awe. "Well," I gasped, "next week I am going to have a baby, but I'll come as soon after that as I can." He laughed heartily. We both knew, as one often does know at a first encounter, that we had begun a momentous experience.

After my second daughter, Elizabeth, was a month old, my husband Eugene Meyer and I paid our first visit to Mr. Freer, in March 1913, in his comfortable, rambling home on tree-lined Ferry Avenue, in the lovely city of Detroit before the automobile industry brutalized it. Although Eugene was heavily preoccupied with his financial interests, he took the time to accompany me, not only because he was eager to see Mr. Freer's treasures, but because mutual Detroit business friends assured him that Mr. Freer was notorious as a gay blade whom no young woman could properly visit alone. This, of course, added spice to my anticipations of our encounter. It intensified my already intense interest in the alluring human being with whom I had felt a mutual, spontaneous and enduring affection from the moment we first shook hands at the gallery in New York.

And what a revelation it was to be the guest of this remarkable man! Our host's sense of form and beauty pervaded everything, from the courtly manner in which we were received at the front door, to the whole atmosphere of the house, to the careful exhibition of the paintings, one by one, hung on a screen which isolated each one from the vast surroundings of the long gallery.

When the light began to wane, Mr. Freer asked Stephen, his butler-curator, to place before us two Japanese screens in a bold design which could still be appreciated in the faint light of a setting sun. As we sat on the floor, leaning on big comfortable pillows, Stephen poured us some vintage champagne which we sipped slowly and appreciatively as we admired the pine-clad mountain scenery of the screens until it faded away under the deepening twilight.

Never will I forget the magic of the first introduction to this great man and his love of great art. In retrospect, discussing Mr. Freer with Eugene, I often tried to define the combination of qualities which made him such a unique personality. I came to the conclusion that the contrast of an extreme delicacy in his tastes and human relationships with a decidedly virile masculinity was perhaps the secret of his mysterious charm.

We dressed carefully for dinner, sensing Mr. Freer's love of decorum. As I lay in a warm bath I noticed on the tiled wall beside me a narrow glass vase held in a wrought-iron bracket, containing a single lovely pink rose which enhanced my meditations on our host's gift for enjoyment of life. The art of hospitality for him was a part of his appreciation of beauty, of the importance of carrying that sense of beauty into human relations as one of the chief influences that the visual arts should have upon mankind. My whole soul rejoiced and sang his praises.

The attractive dinner table, the food, the carefully chosen wines made our first meal a memorable occasion, the perfect setting for good conversation during which Mr. Freer reminisced freely about his youthful friendship with James McNeill Whistler, who had first interested him in the search for ancient Chinese and Japanese art and about his early journeys to Japan and China in response to Whistler's enthusiasm.

Mr. Freer began his reminiscences by voicing his admiration for Whistler, not only as an artist, for in 1894 when Mr. Freer met him he was at the height of his fame, but as a human being of exquisite sensibilities.

I shall now put in sequence the results of many subsequent conversations with Mr. Freer.

At our first meeting Mr. Freer explained that it was Whistler who called his attention to the Japanese screens, the Chinese blue and white china, the fans, ivories, and other things they called "Chinoiserie," as indications of a far earlier and higher culture than that of contemporary China. With his instinct for the development of art, he told Mr. Freer he was certain these recently discovered objects must be the last gasp of a great tradition. He urged his young friend to explore this ancient country as he felt sure he would discover far more important treasures as the source of the trivial objects with which Europeans were now so captivated. Mr. Freer took the suggestion very much to heart and promised Whistler he would visit Japan and China as soon as possible.

Mr. Freer at that time was thirty-eight, and Whistler sixty. As the younger of the two he tried to be helpful to Whistler in so many ways that Whistler referred to Mr. Freer as "General Utility." I had too much respect for my much older friend to call him by his first name; I shortened Whistler's title to "General," which had warmth without familiarity. When I first met Mr. Freer he was fifty-six and I had just turned twenty-six.

But it was something far more intangible than respect which gave flame and color to our relationship. It must be remembered that the whole ethos of the period was nobler than that of today. The exquisite quality of the intimacy that developed between us over the years was possible because, like most of our contemporaries, we both abjured familiarity. The relationships of the period can be illustrated by that between Freer and Whistler — though they were close friends, they addressed each other, as can be seen in their letters, as Mr. Freer and Mr. Whistler. The period was marked by a dignity and mutual respect utterly foreign today to young and old alike. My young contemporaries still looked up to their elders, thereby elevating their own lives instead of debasing themselves as do the young of today by a flaunted contempt for everyone over thirty. As a result, intimacy between friends lacked familiarity, whereas now familiarity is rampant and intimacy almost nonexistent.

My own life was, in fact, enriched, my character developed, my mind stimulated, chiefly by my appreciation of older people. It is no exaggeration to say that most of my education throughout life was derived, not by formal schooling, but from my discriminating admiration for the genius of superior men such as the General.

Mr. Freer also had something like reverence for Whistler's lovely, somewhat fragile wife. On one occasion when Mr. Freer was leaving for a visit to Egypt and India, she begged him to bring her a merle from India, a bird whose song she had often heard was enchanting. Having agreed that her wish should be granted, Mr. Freer spent much of his time in India asking where this miracle bird could be found. In vain. Everybody had heard of merles without the slightest idea how one could be secured. Finally Mr. Freer heard that Hagenbeck, the celebrated collector of wild animals for public zoos and for his delightful circus was in India. He sought him out and was happy to be told that Mr. Hagenbeck, for his own pleasure, had secured three merles, but to please Mrs. Whistler he personally would bring one to her as Mr. Freer could never take proper care of this delicate creature.

It turned out that the merle, with its joyous song, constituted Mrs. Whistler's greatest happiness during the last year of her life. After her death, Mr. Freer, who had come home, received the follow-

ing letter from Whistler from London, which he read to us with deep emotion. He cherished this letter so highly that it is still carefully preserved in the archives of the Freer Gallery, together with almost 200 other Whistler letters. The "Blue and Gold Girl" mentioned in the letter is also in the Gallery. As Mrs. Whistler died May 10, 1896, this undated letter must have been written soon thereafter:

Shall I begin by saying to you, my dear Mr. Freer that your little "Blue and Gold Girl" is doing her very best to look lovely for you?—Perhaps it were well—and so you shall be assured that though steamer after steamer leave me in apparently ungracious silence, it is that only of the pen.

I write to you many letters on your canvass—and one of these days you will, by degrees, read them all, as you sit before your picture.

And in them you will find I hope dimly conveyed my warm feeling of affectionate appreciation for the friendship that has shown itself to me in my forlorn destruction—as it had done before, in our happiness, to both of us—And in the work, perhaps will you, of your refined sympathy and perception, discover the pleasure and interest taken in the perfecting of it by the other one who, with me, liked you—and delighted in the kind and courteous attention paid on your travels to her pretty fancy and expressed wish—

She loved the wonderful bird you sent with such happy care from the distant land!

And when she went—alone because I was unfit to go too—the strange wild dainty creature stood uplifted on the topmost perch and sang and sang—as it had never sung before!—A song of the Sun—and of joy—and of my despair! Loud and ringing clear from the skies! and louder! Peal after peal—until it became a marvel the tiny breast, torn by such glorious cries, should live!

And suddenly it was made known to me that in this mysterious magpie waif from beyond the Temples of India, the spirit of my beautiful Lady had lingered on its way—and the song was *her* song of love—and courage—and command that the *work*, in which she had taken her part, should be complete—and so was her farewell!

I have kept her house—in its freshness and rare beauty—as she had made it—and from time to time, I go to miss her in it—

And in my wanderings, I may come—who knows? to you—as we both had meant to do.

J. MCNEILL WHISTLER

No wonder Mr. Freer cherished this letter. It tells more about the two men, the quality of their friendship and the reason why, in a sense, the whole Freer Gallery of Oriental art is dedicated to Whistler, than anything I could add. It is the finest proof we have that the quarrelsome Whistler, the author of "The Gentle Art of Making Enemies," was not the ruthless man he seemed, but was reacting to the severely critical attacks on his new artistic techniques with the natural impatience of an overly sensitive human being.

The famous Peacock Room at the end of the left wing of the Freer Gallery was itself the cause of a famous quarrel between the artist and the Leyland family by whom it had been ordered to exhibit Mr. Leyland's collection of blue and white porcelains. After Leyland's death, Mr. Freer purchased it and thereby helped put the dispute to rest. The golden peacocks on the wooden shutters and over the shelves at the far end of the room are characteristic of Whistler's élan; but Mr. Freer agreed with the critics that the whole room must have looked appalling when the gilded wooden framework was filled with a bewildering array of Chinese blue and white vases of different dimensions. Its presence in the Freer Gallery as well as the many Whistler paintings, watercolors and etchings are a lasting monument to the friend who launched him on his never-ending quest for the finest specimens of Oriental art. It is to this profound friendship that our country owes its finest introduction to a whole new world, some four thousand years of continuous artistic development, and to the expression of that culture in the highest manifestations of form and color.

On this, our first visit to Mr. Freer he outlined his early attempts to find out whether Whistler's premonitions of a great and ancient Chinese art were indeed a reality, but these first indications of his quest were also filled out in later conversations.

It appears that shortly after retirement from business in 1900, Mr. Freer's first extensive visit to Japan took place. Under the guidance of native scholars he studied the arts, the architecture, and the gardens of Japan, which revealed a deep philosophical basis for the Japanese love of nature in contrast to the sentimental, indiscriminating adoration accorded the more extensive and more varied manifestations of nature in Europe and on our own vast continent. In Japan all was necessarily more diminutive, exquisite, and carefully,



Rose and Silver: The Princess from the Land of Porcelain
by James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903)

cultivated. This contrast was in itself an arresting challenge to this acute observer of detail; it revealed a new outlook on life which penetrated the whole environment as well as the behavior of the Japanese people toward each other and toward their Western guest. Eugene and I knew from our own more recent travels in Japan that this early unknown visitor from America would never have received such a warm and considerate welcome had his numerous hosts not immediately perceived that in Mr. Freer they were becoming acquainted with an American of a very different spirit and mentality than the many coarse specimens of our civilization they had encountered ever since Admiral Perry had first invaded their shores.

For many weeks Mr. Freer was allowed to see the finest treasures, paintings, potteries, screens in the temple collections and the smaller ones in private ownership. It was an intensive, well-nigh exhausting education by which only somebody so deeply interested as Mr. Freer could have profited. After this training he was shown by a dealer, among many other things, a long landscape scroll which was so different in subject matter and technique that he decided it might well be Chinese. He said nothing, as the Japanese dealers preferred their own culture and had at that time but slight knowledge of China. There existed among the Japanese—indeed there still exists—a natural pride in their own aesthetic and spiritual achievements although they have acquired fine examples of Chinese art in recent years and have a respect for the Chinese influence on their own culture.

Mr. Freer, after much persuasion, managed to make this particular landscape scroll one of his many initial acquisitions on this first visit to Japan, as he wished to bring it home for careful, prolonged study. It can still be seen in the Freer Gallery, carefully preserved for its historic importance.

It decided Mr. Freer to visit China again for a more prolonged journey. He mentioned the exact date, which, alas, I have forgotten. It took place during President Theodore Roosevelt's first term. The President insisted that he take a small military bodyguard, as the Chinese had been badly treated by the European powers in many ways and were not too friendly to Western intruders. Thus far few foreigners had visited the interior for the purely disinterested pursuit of studying Chinese art.

It was not surprising that Mr. Freer made no important discoveries on this first exploratory expedition. Even the families that possessed fine objects hid them carefully lest the emissaries of the Empress should express a desire to add them to the imperial collection. Moreover they respected their paintings, jades, bronzes or other objects so profoundly that showing them to an unknown foreigner was out of

the question. When Mr. Freer returned to Shanghai, he consulted the dealers and advised them to look, not for the comparatively modern objects for which they had a big market, but for the early treasures which they knew full well existed but for which heretofore they had no encouragement to seek.

As a result, Mr. Freer as early as May 5, 1906, had amassed a sufficient quantity of important objects of Near and Far Eastern art to make a formal deed of gift to Congress of what he was now entitled to call his collection of Oriental art. He also agreed to construct a suitable building to house his treasures and all his subsequent acquisitions under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution.

He was most specific about the plans for the interior of this building which his architect Charles A. Platt, carried out to the last detail. He wanted the architecture of the interior to be absolutely simple, which would constitute a background for the art objects and not compete with them for the attention of visitors. He insisted on a garden as the center of the gallery, with benches to which students could retire to meditate on the objects they had been studying. This idea had to be sacrificed and the doors to the garden closed, as it was essential for the preservation, especially of the paintings, done on old silk or paper, to keep all the rooms at an even temperature in summer and winter. But all else was carried out meticulously just as Mr. Freer envisioned it. He specified that a corridor should run all around the structure as he detested galleries which obliged the visitor to walk through numerous exhibitions of things in which he was not interested before he arrived at the specific objects he wished to see.

The left side of the gallery was chosen for Chinese art, beginning with the earliest objects, the ancient bronzes and jades, and leading gradually to the objects of the later dynasties. Mr. Freer left the rage for Chinese porcelains to other collectors, but John E. Lodge, the first curator, made a few exceptions when the museum was offered the finest specimens of Ch'ing porcelains in the imperial collection.

It was Mr. Freer's wish that the Chinese side of the building should end with Whistler's Peacock Room as the apogee of the holy of holies, the ultimate offering on the altar of friendship. He also specified that the Whistler paintings and etchings, as well as those of his other American friends, be shown in the rooms across the back of the gallery with occasional exhibitions of his other American paintings according to the decisions of the curator of the Gallery. The right side of the museum was devoted to Japanese art, of which the room of early screens is the most spectacular, but the collection of rare early potteries made for the tea ceremony is the chief delight of all connoisseurs.



Bronze ceremonial vessel of the type *kuang*.
Chinese, early Chou dynasty, late 11th-early 10th century B.C.

THIS IS ONE OF THE IMPORTANT OBJECTS THAT IS BEING BEQUEATHED TO THE
FREER GALLERY BY MRS. EUGENE MEYER.

Mr. Freer took just as active an interest in the storerooms and in the study halls where scholars could peruse an object at length, as he wanted to encourage constant research in this vast new field whose mysteries were just beginning to intrigue the Western world. He was most anxious that the exhibits be changed as frequently as possible since he insisted that there should be no attempt to show too many objects at once, to give every work of art sufficient "breathing space," as he expressed it, out of respect for its beauty and dignity. Would that he might have lived long enough to see how faithfully his wishes were carried out! Merely as an art gallery the Freer Museum is, as a whole, a work of art.

Mr. Freer chose Washington, the Nation's capital, as the site of his museum because he envisaged the capital as a growing center of tourism, and therefore as the real fulcrum for educating the American people to a greater appreciation of the ancient arts of the Near and Far East in their numerous ramifications, and thus to the history and cultural development of the Orient. He also hoped that his example would lead other Americans to found important art galleries in the Nation's capital.

Mr. Freer loved to reminisce about these early days, about his hopes for the future museum as the home of scholarly research as more and more new, unusual and challenging objects were discovered and added to his collection even after his death. He hoped the State Department would use the museum to prove to distinguished visitors from Far Eastern countries that we were not as ignorant of their history and their great cultural achievements as the behavior of many ignorant American officials and tourists might indicate.

His foresight has not yet been wholly appreciated by our equally indifferent politicians. But writing today with a worldwide upheaval taking place largely because of our ignorance of a small nation like Vietnam, whose civil wars go back to ancient days, many years before Christ, I am sure the time is not far off when a better awareness by the general public and also by the Congress, of his great gift to the nation will create a gratitude among the American people that will cause his name to be better known than it is today.

These reminiscences of Mr. Freer's early experiences were pieced together during this first and many subsequent days spent in his hospitable abode in Detroit. Whenever he added some important objects to his collections I would receive an urgent message to come and inspect the new discoveries. Eugene continued to insist that I invite a friend to accompany me into the dangerous lair of Prince Charming. Out of consideration for Eugene's sense of propriety and Mr. Freer's sense of the aesthetic, I first chose my friend Marion Beckett for

my next visit to Detroit, a young woman of such beauty as to challenge the Greek goddesses.

Another time I selected a friend of totally different beauty, Katharine Rhoades, who made such an impression upon him that she later became the General's secretary. He called Marion, Katharine and me the Three Graces. The title "General" stuck and was used by all three of us.

In 1915 the General decided to spend his winters in New York City where he could be in closer touch with the dealers from Shanghai, and with one or two astute Chinese dealers who had opened offices on Fifth Avenue. He lived at the Plaza and, whenever new shipments arrived from the Orient, he would telephone me at 820 Fifth Avenue, where we were living with our two children. As the owner unpacked his wares and hung them on a screen, our moods swung from intense excitement when an interesting new painting appeared, to depression over the more numerous mediocre ones. What an education! I remember one occasion—the General and I were sitting on the floor—when he turned a half somersault of delight over a really new revelation of supreme beauty.

The General was more than generous about sharing his treasure trove with me, but I, on my part, was careful to leave the most important things to him. On one occasion we purchased jointly twelve Chou bronzes of uneven quality because a private owner in China wished to sell them at once and it was a question of all or nothing. When it came to dividing these pieces, the General insisted, in spite of my remonstrance, that I should have first choice. I was careful to select a handsome tall bronze inlaid with malachite, a piece of superb workmanship, probably the origin of cloisonné for which enamel was later substituted in place of malachite. But I chose it because it left the General, when his turn came, an important Chou tripod which I knew he wanted. Thus, turn and turn about, we divided the twelve bronzes, always with consideration, one for the other. Any dyed-in-the-wool collector will recognize what an extraordinary relationship is implied in such mutual consideration and unselfishness when highly desirable objects are at stake.

In his Last Will and Testament, a document drawn up with great care for every detail, Mr. Freer specified that Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, Charles Platt, and Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Meyer were the only persons who could leave bequests to the Freer Gallery. He did this to prevent the accumulation of undesirable objects in the museum. The two older people died without leaving anything to his collection; I am therefore the only person left with this privilege. Naturally I shall bequeath my finest specimens of Chinese and Japanese art to the General's collec-

tion, as Eugene and I would never have found them had it not been for his help and for the fact that I inherited his dealers after his death.

As long as we collected together we bought freely, often just for study purposes. Of course, we made mistakes. It was a totally unknown world we were exploring and there was nobody to guide us. But on the whole we came out well, for we also acquired several masterpieces whose present value paid for numerous misjudgments. The General's eye was critical and discerning, as he had been collecting Whistler etchings since 1887 and began to purchase Japanese prints in 1892. I always remained his ardent disciple. It was a challenge to both of us, this approach to an ancient national culture not under expert guidance, whether personal or written, but by the great objects it had produced. We read as much history of China as was then available, but to both of us it was a unique experience to explore an unknown civilization, not at second hand but by its actual products which conveyed its quality with a freshness of impact that no amount of derivative information can give.

We also had amusing experiences visiting what we called the "junk shops," the popular Chinese shops of which there were several. They displayed their newly acquired trivia on long tables. The General walked down one side, I on the other, keeping our eyes open for unexpected finds. It was a gay rivalry. On one of the expeditions I discovered a small T'ang bronze rabbit inlaid with gold, so sensual in lovely rounded form, so exquisite in material and workmanship, so humorous in its obvious timidity that it has ever since been on my dressing table where I see it every day. When Paul Claudel, the French poet, saw its frightened expression he remarked, "*Il regarde sa lapine.*" (He is looking at his mate.)

Throughout these four years when the General and I collected together, Eugene not only took part in our adventures, but also developed an independent friendship with him. Both men were industrialists, as Mr. Freer had helped to found and develop the American Car and Foundry Company before he resigned from business life in 1900. The General also had a profound admiration for Eugene as a financier and often took his advice when he needed additional funds for the acquisition of art objects or the construction on the Mall in Washington of the Freer Art Gallery. As Eugene became better acquainted with Charles Platt, the architect for the museum, he also studied Mr. Platt's domestic architecture and decided he should create the new house we planned to build in Mount Kisco.

This acquaintanceship with Mr. Platt is one of the really great

contributions the General made to our lives; for the severely simple architectural masterpiece Mr. Platt produced for us overlooking Byram Lake in Mt. Kisco, built of the local stone, has been a constant source of deep satisfaction to us, to our children and grandchildren and to our friends.

Unfortunately, the General did not live to see it completed, although he loved to think of the "Chinese" room on the third floor with its distant view over the hills, not yet scarred by human habitation, and his own bedroom next to it, done in his favorite color combination of blue and eggplant purple.

Eugene was so diplomatic in his relationship with the General that he was able to make a notable contribution to the Freer Gallery, something the General would not have accepted from anybody else. Poirer, the French dressmaker, put his large T'ang Buddhist stone Bodhisattva on sale in New York at a time when Mr. Freer had expended his income for that year. Eugene purchased it and persuaded the General to accept it as a gift, not to him but to the future Gallery.

I had one experience which showed how sensitive the General was about any monetary assistance. A Chinese dealer brought him a pair of white pottery vases which he wanted to buy but refused because the man asked the then exorbitant price of \$1500.00. That very afternoon, strolling along Fifth Avenue, I passed the window of one of our "junk shops" and there, amidst all sorts of riffraff were the two beautiful vases! I walked in, asked the price of numerous other objects to conceal my excitement, and then asked how much for the vases. Three hundred dollars! I offered him \$250, which was accepted after the usual haggling on which the Chinese merchants of those days depended as a matter of prestige, tradition, and a concept of trade very different from ours—more of a game, a way of life, far more playful than ours.

I rushed back to the Plaza and put the vases, as a surprise, in Mr. Freer's lap. He was outraged. "Agnes, how could you do such a thing after I had refused—" I broke in to allay the storm. When I told him my story of the purchase and the price I had paid, he was mollified and also intrigued. Were they the same vases or had numerous pairs been shipped to the United States? In any case he was proud to have rejected the exorbitant price at which they had been offered him.

In addition to the excitement, joy and gaiety of collecting ever-new revelations of the Chinese genius, the General's presence in New York made it possible for us to have many long, quiet talks. Much of our conversation was concerned with the history of China and the forces which had created the various kinds of Chinese art, why the

early bronzes and jades, and especially why the sudden burst of interest in Chinese landscape painting beginning slowly in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., expanding in the T'ang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.) and flourishing into full flower in the Sung (960-1270 A.D.) and subsequent periods, until the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 A.D.) saw the beginning of its gradual decline. What worried the General was a theory advanced by Ernest Fenollosa when little was known in the Western world about early Chinese history, that Japanese landscape art and Chinese art generally were of Buddhist origin. Fenollosa was an American who had settled in Japan, married a Japanese woman, and been converted to Buddhism. He knew very little, if anything, about early Chinese history. With the zeal of a convert he asserted that the Zen Buddhist sect, called the Ch'an sect by the Chinese, had inspired the interest of both Japan and China in landscape painting. This theory, to the General, constituted a great wrong, a denigration of the originality of the Chinese genius.

At this time, 1915, I had already been studying the classical Chinese language with Professor Friedrich Hirth of Columbia University for three years, in order to gain access to the original Chinese texts of which few translations had been made at that time. The General's chief refutation of Fenollosa's theory was the logical statement: "If Buddhism had created Chinese landscape painting in China and Japan, why did it not have the same effect in India where Buddhism originated and where art was preoccupied with sculptural depictions of the gods and goddesses?" As he knew I was planning to write a history of Chinese painting, the General made me promise to clear up this problem. Fenollosa's impact seemed to the General due to the lack of original sources and to the fact that he, Fenollosa, was the first Westerner to discuss the religious and philosophical origins of Chinese landscape art. As the years went by, with the help of Professor Hirth and an excellent Chinese scholar, Mr. T. Y. Leo, I was able to point out to the General with much documentary proof that some Buddhist sects, especially the Ch'an or Zen sect, had undergone a complete transformation in China, that this profoundly earthy people had turned an introspective religion outward toward the contemplation of nature's wonders.

In other words, as I explained to the General, Zen Buddhism was as much a product of the ancient Chinese naturalistic attitude to life as was Taoism, which was the chief source of the beautiful T'ang and Sung landscapes. "Promise me," said the General, "that you will describe this whole historical development in convincing detail." I made a promise which took ten years to carry out, what with exacting family responsibilities and the construction of our country home at Mount Kisco. The General was no longer alive when my book on

"Chinese Painting as Reflected in the Art and Thought of Li Lung-Mien" was published in 1923. Without the memory of his approval which I felt like a blessing, I am sure I could not have completed the task. I dedicated the book to him and stated in the introduction that it was but a dim reflection of his teaching and insight.

Many of our conversations when the General lived so near to me were of a more personal nature, including among many things the reason why he had never married. He intimated that there was in his family a history of what could only have been congenital syphilis which had at times incapacitated some of his forebears. In other words, another instance of Ibsen's "Ghosts."

Even when Eugene and I first met Mr. Freer he was already suffering from a slight impediment in his right leg which made it necessary for him to use a cane. But he was physically so active, his mind and his imagination so enchanting, that it never occurred to me to worry about him. I did not yet know that his doctor, George Draper was giving him painful spinal injections from time to time, for he was too brave to complain. I also met Mr. Freer's younger brother, the only one remaining of several who had died years ago. It always saddened me to see him as his physique was somewhat impaired by the same unfortunate heritage.

Our spiritual intimacy frequently led the General to talk freely about his numerous relationships with the opposite sex, which were a by-product of his enforced celibacy and no secret from his many friends. Always he emphasized their transitory nature and the aesthetic aspects which characterized not only his attitude toward sex, but that of his cronies, among whom Stanford White was a leading spirit. Their escapades were too numerous for repetition. One scene he retold remained vividly in my mind: A Mr. Jerome who had a villa in Capri staged a party for them in the famous Blue Grotto so that they could observe the movements of the most beautiful Neapolitan artists' models as they swam naked in the brilliantly colored water. Suddenly a bespectacled German scholar came on the scene to study the rock formation. He took one look at the Naiads disporting themselves in the bright blue sea and their not so scholarly, but very attentive, audience. Then he fled precipitately without comment.

Again and again the General expressed his gratitude to the Japanese for having raised his whole concept of sex to greater awareness of its poetry and its profoundly spiritual aspects. It was educational to hear his comparison of our Western crudity toward physical relationships between men and women with the studied delicacy of the cultured geishas who were carefully trained intellectually to a point where they anticipated the slightest interest of their guests.

Clearly, the Japanese looked upon sex as a vital aspect of life and, therefore, developed its possibilities artistically, as they did every other manifestation of human existence. One need only think of their architecture, their gardens, and the tea ceremony with its beautiful bowls and other accoutrements; above all, their concern for good manners, all refinements that have been impaired but not wholly destroyed by the aftermath of Western influence since World War II.

Doubtless our devotion to each other was enriched by our common devotion to this amazing Far Eastern culture refined over four millennia by the Chinese and Japanese nations which gave a unique and exquisite quality to our relationship. In any case, this peculiar spiritual affinity proved its strength when Mr. Freer became ever more fragile and in 1918-19 mentally affected by his heritage of an unconquerable disease.

I first noticed the General's increasing sensitivity to anything that displeased him when in 1917 Katharine Rhoades, Charles Platt, and I accompanied him on a journey to Chicago to inspect an exhibition of his Chinese collection at the Art Institute. It was agonizing to forestall any incident which might upset him. To our great relief the careful display of the objects he had loaned to the museum met with his approval, but at the hotel, thoroughly fatigued, he could only be quieted by the promise that several bellhops would be dismissed.

These outbreaks of temper in a man so considerate of everyone caused me great suffering for the General's dignity. Impossible to explain to everybody that he was not well. His impatience vented itself on everyone, from his closest friends to a casual encounter. I was the only one who escaped censure with the exception of one difficult episode when I expressed the opinion that a certain painting which we both hoped was of the Sung Dynasty was in my opinion, upon closer study, a Ming copy. The next day, after a reappraisal of the painting, the General agreed with me and all was well between us.

While we still lived in New York, worry often caused me to drop in at the Gotham Hotel late at night if Eugene and I went out to dinner, just to make sure that his nurse was taking good care of him. One evening he was in bed, so deeply disturbed that he could not go to sleep. He greeted me as his savior—"Oh; Agnes, I need you. Please telephone the management to stop these machines which are making such a hideous noise in my rooms."

Well I knew that it was useless to say bluntly, "There are no machines in your room." Then and there I began a careful approach, always thought out, to allay his fears. "We are good friends, aren't we, General?" He clasped my hand tightly. "How can you ask?"

"You believe what I say, don't you?"

"Darling, you know I do."

"I have never lied to you about anything, have I, General?"

"What a question! I believe everything you say, always."

Thus, in long roundabout ways that took more careful steps than I can recount, I would face him with the final question: "Then if I say to you there are no machines in the room, will you take my word for it?"

"Are you sure? Do you really mean it?"

"I give you my word of honor, dear General, that there are no machines. You and I are here quietly together."

His eyes closed. Gradually his tight hold on my hand relaxed. The General was asleep.

There were many such heartrending scenes between us. I learned psychology the hard way. His trust in my love and devotion never faltered. It was a strange and painful ordeal to live through the disintegration, gradual but irresistible, of a mind so noble and a character so exemplary.

When Eugene's war work obliged us to move to Washington with the children in the fall of 1917, I often came to New York despite my heavy responsibilities to the children and Eugene, to watch over my great friend, for he was at times so noisy that I feared the Gotham management might ask him to leave. I became impatient with Dr. Draper when he had all his lovely Chinese objects removed lest he destroy them in one of his angry moods.

I brought him a pair of clasped pottery hands, broken off by merchant vandals from one of those T'ang pottery Lohans recently discovered in ancient tombs. I chose them because the General had a deep emotional response to their spiritual quality. Frequently he sat thoughtfully in his big armchair next to the window lovingly clasping these hands in his. Did he know that the angel of death hovered over him? In between his nervous attacks the General was his normal, utterly charming self, yet I felt a sadness in some of his moods that made my heart all the heavier because I had to pretend not to notice it.

One morning Kay Rhoades telephoned me at the St. Regis Hotel to come over quickly as the General was out of control. I could hear him down the hall. Gathered in the waiting room were Kay, Dr.

Draper, and two nurses, while the General stormed around his rooms, shouting, smashing his heavy cane against the furniture in an attack of sheer madness more extreme than any I had heretofore experienced. Dr. Draper assured me it was too dangerous to go into his presence. The only thing to do was to wait for his dementia to subside.

I knew this could not go on lest the hotel management banish him. I could not face the possibility that my beloved General be sent to a mental institution. Not without trepidation, I determined to rely on our close intuitive relationship and make an effort to reach through his madness to his real self. I opened the door, walked rapidly toward him before he could hit me with his cane, pinned my eyes with all my young force on those insane eyes that terrified me, and said quietly, very quietly, "Good morning, General." For a few seconds it was touch and go. Probably it was my familiar voice that first reached him, as he did not recognize me until his mind gained a slight ascendancy. But, thank God, he loved me enough so that the memory of my affectionate intonations could penetrate his veil of confusion. Gradually those mad eyes began ever so slightly to focus, and suddenly, with a deep sigh of relief, as if he were escaping from some intolerable burden, he said to me, cautiously, "It's you, Agnes, isn't it?"

"Yes, of course it's Agnes. Let's sit down, General."

I led him to his chair and talked soothingly, as if nothing had happened. Dr. Draper came in to take over. I went home drained of all my physical strength. Had my beloved General and I not developed our spiritual relationship to such an intensity that it was stronger than the demons which had begun to haunt him, I don't know what tragedy might have ensued.

For him as well as for his family and his closest friends it was a merciful relief when in 1919 the General's hopeless struggle with his inherited disease ended in death. When he was about to be buried I dropped upon his coffin some lotus flowers which he loved because of their mythical significance, and therefore had persuaded me to grow.

Now a terrible problem confronted me after the General's death. We had visited the Boston Museum of Fine Arts together several years before and after much discussion decided that its Curator of Far Eastern Art, John E. Lodge, was the only scholar who could cope with the difficult task of cataloguing and arranging the exhibitions of the Freer collection of Oriental art, of some American paintings by contemporary artists who were the General's personal friends, and the Whistler collection, especially the famous Peacock Room. Mr. Freer had talked over all the details with Mr. Lodge, who agreed that he would come to Washington as the first Curator of the Gallery with

full power to make all major decisions, especially the purchase of new acquisitions for which Mr. Freer bequeathed liberal funds. Then the dear General, in one of his nervous moods insulted John Lodge, who did not fully understand his condition. Whereupon the proud, sensitive, aloof Mr. Lodge, not long before the General's death, had categorically refused to accept the position of Curator.

After the General's death I pleaded in vain with Mr. Lodge to change his mind. In desperation I had a good talk with Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, his father, describing to that crabbed but charming old egoist, how proud he would be if his only remaining son came to Washington as the acknowledged head of his profession in our country. The argument had its effect. With the Senator's pleading, we overcame John's natural resentment of the General's unintentional rudeness. He agreed to accept the onerous task of cataloguing a very uneven collection and installing the first exhibition. It took three years. He and I looked it all over together before the official opening on May 2, 1923. There they were, the paintings on the walls, the jades, potteries and bronzes in simple glass cases. I looked at them and felt as though I were communing with old friends who had been put behind invisible prison walls. Our old intimacy had been sacrificed to their careful preservation for the delight and instruction of future generations. That's what museums are for.

I did not go to the official opening. My heart was still too deeply concerned with the great man who had made it possible.

But my efforts to protect Mr. Freer's gift to the nation and carry out his wishes as expressed in his Will, had not ended.

His Will made it clear that the income from the endowment fund was to be used "for the study of the civilization of the Far East," for additions to his collection, and for the salary of the Curator, who was given absolute authority in all matters connected with the management and expansion of the Gallery. In accepting the gift in 1906 during the administration of President Theodore Roosevelt, the Smithsonian Institution, as representative of the government, was responsible only for care and maintenance of the building and collection.

Alas! Public officials hate to see large sums of money under their care that they have no right to expend according to their own wishes.

Dr. Charles D. Walcott, who was Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution when the Freer Gallery was placed under its jurisdiction, soon began to make plans for control of the Gallery and the use of its funds for his own research work which was not even remotely connected with Far or Near Eastern art. He even groaned to me about

the sixteen thousand dollars Mr. Platt paid for a carpet in the auditorium: "Just think of the research I could do with that money!"

He tried to invent reasons why his rock chipping in the Western mountains was related to the early migrations of Eskimos and Indians from Asia and therefore a legitimate cause for financial support under Mr. Freer's Will. To all these hints Mr. Lodge was impervious, and according to Mr. Freer's expressed wishes, rightly so. Dr. Walcott then deliberately picked a bitter quarrel with Mr. Lodge, of which I knew nothing, with the result that Mr. Lodge was obliged to resign. Dr. Walcott got the acceptance of the Board of Regents for this resignation without explaining to them that he, himself, had brought it about. In Mr. Lodge's place, Dr. Walcott planned to put a Shanghai ignoramus who happened to be in town, a man who knew nothing about Chinese art but who would accept Dr. Walcott's orders on the expenditure of the Gallery's income.

At this stage I heard about Walcott's skulduggery and persuaded Eugene to go with me to see U. S. Chief Justice Taft, ex-officio Chairman of the Smithsonian's Board of Regents, the real guardians of the Freer Gallery, and explain to him that Walcott's plotting must be undone.

"But I don't know anything about Chinese art and I can't be bothered with it," groaned Mr. Taft.

"You are going to learn a great deal about Chinese art," threatened Eugene, "unless you see to it at once that Mr. Lodge, the outstanding scholar in the field, is reinstated immediately by the Regents, since he is the Curator by Mr. Freer's own choice."

The fact that John was the son of the powerful Senator Lodge probably expedited his reinstatement and the dismissal of the pathetic substitute. But thinking of this barefaced attempt on the part of a Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution to control the Freer Gallery and its funds, John Lodge trained his successor Archibald Wenley, for many years, to succeed him. Mr. Wenley likewise trained the present Director of the Freer Gallery, John Pope. Mr. Pope continued the tradition, so that his First Assistant, Harold P. Stern, will in two years, when Mr. Pope retires at age 65, the age of retirement, become his worthy successor. But when I am no longer here to protect the scholarly standards of research and the quality of the new acquisitions, which were established by Mr. Freer's first Curator, John Lodge, I hope and pray that the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian will maintain as a sacred trust, the integrity and independence of the greatest gallery of Oriental art in the Western world, and the confidence Mr. Freer had in their power to do this.

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